

SENATE BILL 408

By Gresham

AN ACT to name a bridge in Somerville in honor of Colonel
Will Rhea Winfrey, United States Army, Retired.

WHEREAS, from time to time, the members of this General Assembly have seen fit to name certain highways and bridges to honor those exemplary military officers who served this nation with courage, dedication, and ability; and

WHEREAS, no Tennessean is more deserving of this honor than Colonel Will Rhea Winfrey, United States Army, Retired; and

WHEREAS, Will Rhea Winfrey, born September 1, 1916, on the family homestead in Fayette County, was the fourth and youngest son of Arthur Peter Winfrey and his wife, Harriet Rhea Winfrey. He and his brothers and three sisters were the fourth generation to live and work on the family home place of Chestnut Hill, circa 1830, located six miles north of Somerville, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Will Rhea Winfrey attended Glade Springs School and Somerville Elementary and graduated from Fayette County High School in 1935. He accepted a football scholarship to Southwestern College (now Rhodes College) in Memphis. He excelled in sports and was a member of the 1936, 1937 and 1938 Southwestern football teams. The 1936 Lynx squad defeated Vanderbilt 12-0 and the 1937 squad defeated Mississippi State 7-3. Will Rhea, an outstanding fullback, served as Alternate Captain on the 1939 football team known as the "Iron Men"; and

WHEREAS, at the Rhodes College Athletic Hall of Fame, a plaque states: "No one in the State of Tennessee was better than Will Rhea Winfrey in the shot put." His throw of 46' 11" broke the Tennessee record, as well as the school record. He also set a school record in the discus with a throw of 126' 7". In 1938 Will Rhea was the top point man for the Lynx track and

field team and was named Most Valuable Athlete for his accomplishments.” He was inducted into Rhodes College Athletic Hall of Fame in October 2006; and

WHEREAS, upon graduation from Southwestern, Will Rhea Winfrey worked for DuPont in Memphis before the United States Army requested his services in July 1941. He was only to serve for one year and was at Fort Lee, Virginia, when the United States entered into World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Will Rhea’s oldest brother, John and younger sister, Harriet were two of five family members at Pearl Harbor on that fateful day. He recalls spending Christmas Day 1941 as a “buck private” on the train to Fort Ord, California, heading out to fight the Japanese. He spent the next twenty years in the United States Army serving his country; and

WHEREAS, during World War II, Will Rhea Winfrey served in the 242nd Quartermaster Battalion in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. He recalls his battalion taking enemy fire as countless units did, as they moved onto the beaches of Italy. Upon returning from the war abroad, Will Rhea Winfrey married Marquerite Mason, on September 11, 1945, in Memphis, during leave after escorting a train loaded with soldiers from Washington, D.C., to Georgia. His military service took him, his wife, and son, to Europe and Japan. Later they returned to the United States where he was Commanding Officer at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, before retiring in 1961 as Colonel from the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, Will Rhea Winfrey moved his family back to Fayette County in 1961, and built “The Woods” next to his beloved home place, Chestnut Hill. Today, the Colonel, as he is affectionately known, at ninety-four years of age and visually impaired, stays active and involved with his family, community, church, and county politics. Will Rhea considers it an honor that he and longtime friend and fellow Fayette Countian, Lt. Governor John S. Wilder, spent the “Governor’s” last Christmas Day afternoon in 2009, at “The Woods” enjoying each other’s company and talking of old times, loving families and good friends; and

WHEREAS, it is most appropriate for this General Assembly to name a certain bridge in his native Somerville in Colonel Will Rhea Winfrey's honor to recognize his life of purpose and commitment to his fellow Americans; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the bridge nearest to 11775 State Highway 59 in Somerville is hereby designated the "Col. Will Rhea Winfrey Bridge" as a tribute to one of the most distinguished military officers and public servants this state has ever produced.

SECTION 2. The department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating the bridge described in Section 1 as the "Col. Will Rhea Winfrey Bridge".

SECTION 3. The erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5. This act shall become operative only if the cost of the manufacture and installation of such signs is paid to the department of transportation from non-state funds within one (1) year of the effective date of this act. Such payment shall be made prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to the person or entity paying for such signs within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, an amount equal to the difference in such costs shall be remitted to the department in non-

state funds within thirty (30) days of the sponsoring person or entity receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.